

**A Sea Angler guide to**

# **SUMMER BOAT FISHING**

**Where, how and  
when to catch  
your share**

**FREE**

# Opportunity knocks as

BOAT fishing through spring and summer into autumn offers some superb opportunities. The sea is generally calmer than in winter (although there can be exceptions) and the tides too are often less severe. As the inshore waters around the British Isles begin to warm up after winter many species of fish which departed in autumn begin their return.

Some, like thornback rays, for example, are back in late March and early April. Others like tope are not back in strength until June. Some – and mako shark are the prime example – may not come at all.

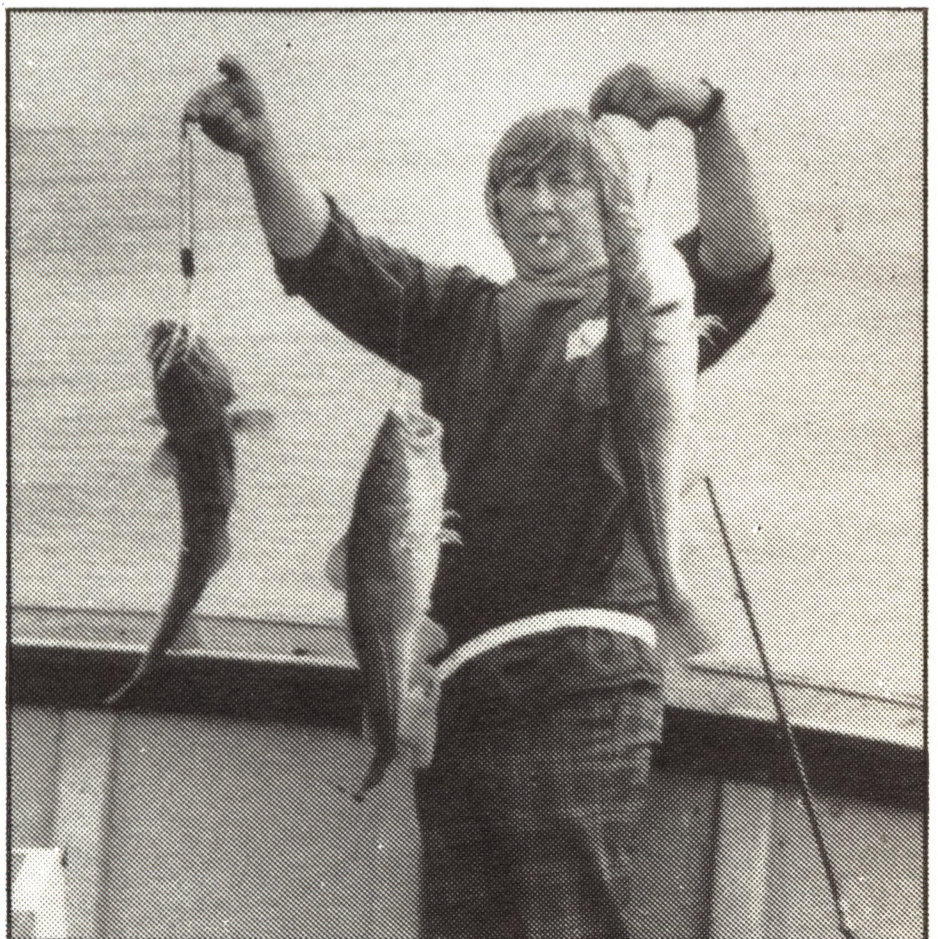
It is, therefore, extremely important that everyone who sets out to catch sea fish by boat fishing should know where and when they have the best chance. Fishing can be expensive and time-wasting if there is no reward. It is the function of this booklet to help every angler minimise that waste by pointing him or her to the right time and place for each of the most important species.

Many of the fish can be caught from small boats used by anglers who trail their own craft to the place of their choice and launch either from the beach or into an estuary. But the majority of sea anglers are dependant on hire craft for their sport. They can be confident there are large numbers of fine, well-skippered craft at their disposal. All they need to do is make the booking.

If this booklet helps to solve the selection problems relating to time and place it must also help point would-be hirers to the best boats at the right terms.

Sea Angler's classified advertisement pages details the men and boats available – but it is important to book well in advance of the actual date. Six months is by no means too much if you set your cap for a particular boat. So book early

*Summer cod fishing can be fast and furious. Three at a time is always possible on offshore ground and over wrecks.*



# summer fish return

and ensure you know exactly what you will get for your money. Be precise about the times of departure and return to port. If you have a particular preference talk to the skipper about it. Let him help you to pick the right tide. Take his advice.

Find out whether bait is included in the terms of hire or is an extra. Above all ensure you phone the skipper the night prior to departure to check that all is well weather-wise. No skipper puts to sea in a gale and he may have to cancel because of bad weather. Save yourself an unnecessary journey if you can.

Now it can be difficult for individual anglers to book places for themselves. In many instances skippers let the entire boat for the day to a club or to one angler who takes the responsibility for filling the eight, ten or twelve places on board. It is, therefore, easier for a club to book a boat . . . which in turn suggests that every aspiring boat angler should either be a member of a club or at least one of a group of pals who are prepared to fill all the places. If you intend to fish regularly there is no other way, short of owning your own boat.

Dress for comfort, but remember to take enough clothing, tackle and food. Once at sea you can't go back for more. The skipper will likely supply all the tea and coffee you can drink – but check that too. Don't rely on it until you know. If you have any doubts about your stomach neither over-eat nor drink heavily the night before. Have a good night's sleep, a light breakfast and dress to stay warm.

Angling hasn't got any easier in recent years due to heavy commercial fishing but there are more than enough fish around for most of the time for you to enjoy yourself . . . if you choose wisely, and follow the advice given here and now.

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## Bass

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HOWEVER much some anglers may regret it, there's now no denying that the best chance of catching big bass is by fishing from a boat. Big fish are taken from the shore annually, of course, some of them really heavy ones too, but statistics show boat fishing provides the best and perhaps the easiest opportunities.

That much is down to the decline in bass stocks. The fish are now no longer spread evenly along the shoreline. Shore catches are down, but anglers who pick the right locations can still, regardless of the long term commercial pressure on bass stocks, return good catches afloat.

The extra mobility available to boat anglers ensures they can get to well stocked grounds, whereas the shore man is much more dependant on the occasional good fish showing up by chance. As a general rule the biggest bass concentrations are found well

offshore and it is only when these big packs of fish split up that segments of each group range along the shoreline.

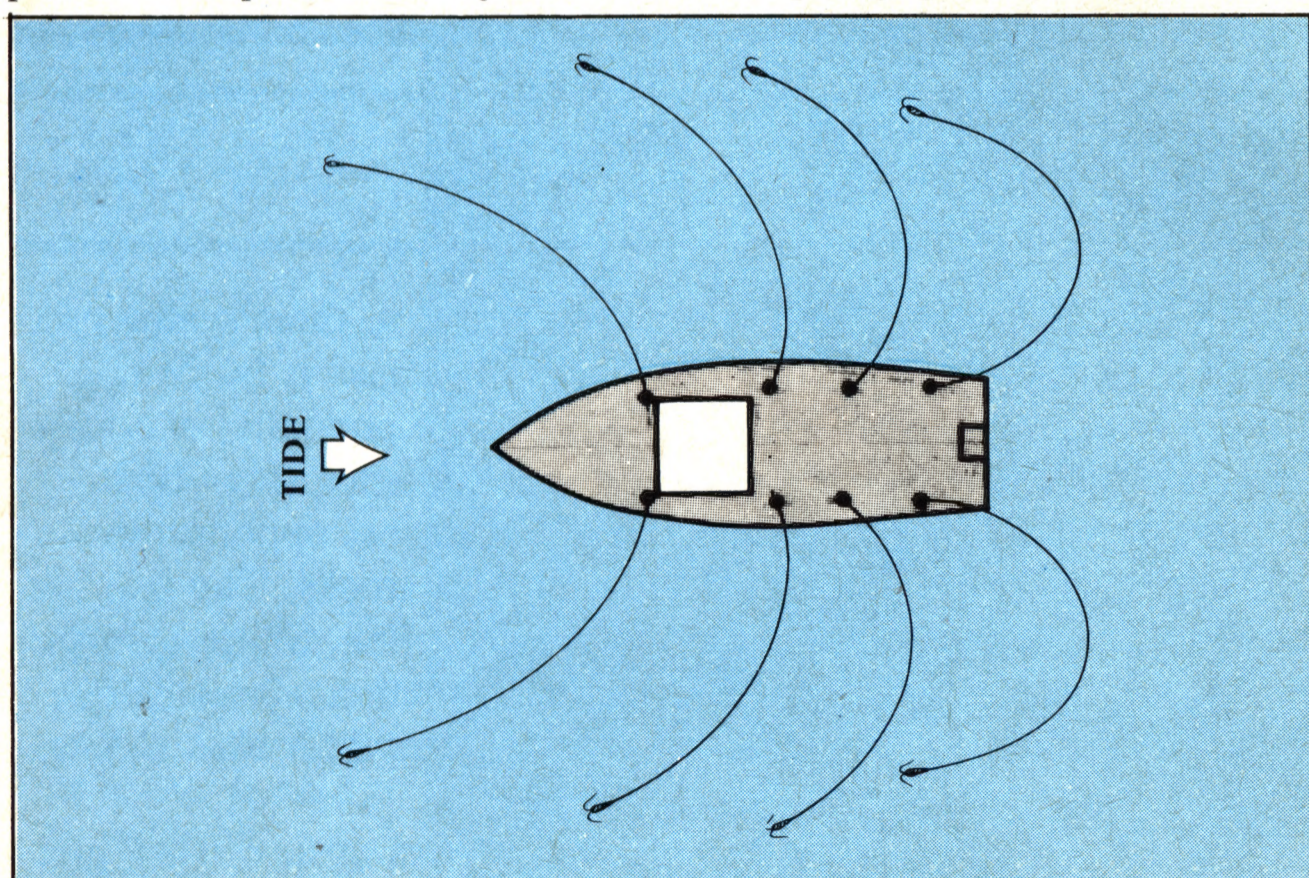
So boat fishing gets more of the fish. . . but where? Fish, like all living creatures, choose their living ground carefully for ease of living and that means for easy food-availability. So they are more often located in the faster-moving water over sand banks that exist both immediately and much further offshore.

Bass find rock and reef situations equally attractive with the result that experienced boat skippers and anglers know exactly where to make their effort. The main bass-producing grounds are offshore sandbanks in the southern North Sea, and outer Thames Estuary, The Shambles Bank and Portland Race, and the general area of the Eddystone Rock, off Plymouth. There are others too, of course, but those mentioned are the best grounds.

So boat fishing gets more of the fish . . . but where? Fish, like all living creatures, choose their living ground carefully for ease of living and that means for easy food-availability. So they are more solitary loners that make up most of the big shore-caught fish are more often taken after dark, the boat-caught fish are generally taken in broad daylight . . . even from shallow water.

If you want bass then clear thinking is essential. Go for a boat operating within range of some of the better target areas and make it clearly known to your skipper at the time you make the booking that it is bass you want. In fact it is better to plan a trip many months in advance – when the best boats are still likely to be available and not fully booked. You then ask your skipper to name the best dates for bass so far as he can predict them. Give him every chance to find you fish – and since he knows (if he's worth his salt) the best time and tides that does help him to help you.

The heaviest catches of all can be expected out of Essex ports where boats fish the offshore banks. It is debatable if these will continue to be as productive a few years ahead since commercial pressure is still increasing but at least for the present they are the best possibilities. So ports like Bradwell and Brightlingsea are the points of departure. Maybe there are equally good prospects out



*Uptide legering is the best method in shallow to average depths. Note how the eight anglers space the position of their tackle on the seabed to increase their chances.*

of Harwich but so far there is little or no activity by rod and line against offshore bass off Norfolk and Suffolk. Perhaps that is yet to come as further offshore bass stocks are discovered. We should not, though, delude ourselves that the commercial fishermen have not already found fish here.

The east-facing shoreline of Kent offers access to more good bass grounds but further down-Channel along the remaining Kent and Sussex shore the bass are as likely to show over wrecks or closer inshore along the rock-strewn areas. Chichester harbour and its approaches provides one of the areas where large concentrations of mini-bass get massive over-fishing commercially. A 12-inch limit is not enough and the increase to 15 inches – promised but then withdrawn by the fishing authorities – would do much to protect these tiny fish.

Anglers using their own small boats can expect to do well very early and late in good summer days when operating close inshore around the whole of the shoreline extending westward as far as Falmouth. Trolling real or artificial sandeels behind slow-moving boats is a very killing method – in estuaries as well as in the open sea. Success is also possible fishing baits on the seabed from moored boats anchored over carefully-chosen ground.

Poole, Weymouth, Exmouth, Torquay, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Plymouth, Looe and Fowey are the main charter boat ports offering bassing in the lower English Channel, while on the good weather days there is also every chance for owners of small boats who launch on to the generally more violent waters of the north Devon and Cornish coasts.

Big bass are taken deep in the Bristol Channel but on the Welsh side the best prospects are generally from Swansea westward around the Gower Coast and onwards. Perhaps the most unsung of all Welsh bass ports is Burry Port, where many fine aggregate catches can be made from Burry Inlet. At times 10-pounders can be as common here as from the Essex coast. Small boat fishing along the shoreline of all the west-facing Welsh terrain would be very productive at times but is not widely carried out – or perhaps not well publicised. Cardigan Bay contains its share of the big fish, as does the Lleyn peninsular.

Anglesey and the North Wales shoreline is heavily fished by commercial methods but experienced bass anglers can contrive several good fish each year, especially late in the season. Arthur Burslem, from Colwyn Bay, for example, usually manages two bass of 10lb or better every year, plus many supporting bass of lesser weight from ground many others reject as hopeless.

Bass are found intermittently further north but terminate as a sport-giving species south of Stranraer. Northumberland is virtually their upper limit on the eastern side since the fish much prefer the warmer water of the southern part of Britain.

Although serious bass fishing can begin as early as June, the best results everywhere come late in the summer, with autumn the key time for the really big fish. Settled weather is a helpful factor in offshore fishing, not least since the sea can soon become violent in areas where the sea is extremely shallow.

Recommended tackle: Bass can be taken on a great variety of methods, so lure fishing, trolling and bait-fishing the seabed all produce fish. Essentially, though, all bass fishing from a boat can

be with light tackle – mono line of 15lb breaking strain or less, fished on lightweight multiplier or fixed-spool reels according to taste. The rod can, for best sporting qualities, be in the order of 10ft long.

All conventional baits will catch bass but live sandeel is most popular in the south-west – where it is widely-available. Elsewhere anglers are belatedly discovering the appeal of frozen sandeel, with the commercially-produced imitations, Red Gill and Eddystone, also very killing.

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## Blue shark

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THE blue shark is far and away the most common of the sharks that are found in the waters around the British Isles. They arrive within range of charter fishing boats towards the end of May or early June, depending on water temperature, and can, under good conditions, be caught as late as October in some favoured areas.

Like the mako and thresher sharks, the blue is not widely travelled around the British coast. There are no known instances of blues ever being caught in the North Sea and they are at their most numerous off the West Country shoreline, off South and West Wales and along the Irish coast from Wexford south-westward as far as the Fastnet Light.

At times small fish of the species, often little if any bigger than middleweight tope, are very numerous and as many as 30 can be boated in a single day. Odds are, though, that most of those fish will weigh rather less than 70lb each . . . and if they are caught on heavyweight shark tackle they are then less sporting by far than tope taken on more modest gear.

Any blue shark weighing 100lb or more is a very good fish of the species. The British record stands at 218lb and that fish has reigned supreme for almost a quarter of a century. It is, in fact, the only 200-pounder on record, the next best weighing in at 190lb (from Falmouth, 1967).

Blue sharks can be caught well up the English Channel and from Welsh waters too (Cardigan Bay and the outer Bristol Channel) but the main ports from which to embark are either Cornish or are in Ireland. Rivalling Looe, Fowey, Mousehole and other Cornish ports are Irish centres ranging westward from Dungarvan. The main Irish departure points for blue shark fishing are Youghal, Cobh, Kinsale and Courtmacsherry.

Since the fish are generally the smallest of the sharks to visit the British Isles they can be tackled rather lighter than their heavier relations. Most shark boats have hire tackle on board, but for those who prefer their own, a 30lb Class rod and a multiplier reel containing 350 yards of 30lb line should be adequate. And it will be . . . unless you should happen on to a real heavyweight.

There was a time when blue sharks suffered heavy casualties because anglers and skippers killed virtually all they caught. The increasing awareness of the need for conservation now sees very substantial proportions of the annual catch released without ever being brought into the boat. If the hook cannot easily be freed, the trace is simply cut close to the fish's mouth so that the fish can swim off.

# Cod

BY GENERAL consent, cod are widely recognised as a winter species. True more are taken from the shore in winter than in summer but the fact remains that staggeringly-high aggregate catches including some extremely heavy specimens can be taken in the summer.

The British record cod, a 53-pounder, was, in fact such a fish and was caught from a wreck well offshore from Plymouth in 1972. By a rank beginner too . . . so there is genuine hope for everyone provided only that the fishing ground is carefully chosen.

In recent years Yorkshire, Cleveland and Durham ports have won themselves a tremendous reputation for huge hauls of cod, made fishing pirks and muppets well offshore. For the uninitiated, that means using heavy chromed lures and plastic artificial squid.

The best single haul in 1983 was 5,000lb of cod to just five anglers made aboard 'Dark Island' out of Whitby. That catch included many fish over 20lb each, while the ground as a whole can be expected to produce cod either marginally falling short of or just topping 40lb each.

Mid-summer is the peak time, with key ports, Whitby, Bridlington, Scarborough, and Hartlepool. Similar catches are, though, attainable from other East Coast ports north of the Humber. This, like most top-quality fishing, calls for early bookings.

For individual anglers that means joining a club – often the best basis for good fishing anyway. Clubs book the full boat for the day and offer the places to members, whereas an individual is unable to fill the boat himself, making his enquiries less tempting to charter skippers.

At its peak, cod are caught up to three and four at a time on multi-lure rigs but the method is not everyone's favourite. The standard tactic is to jig the lures at the required depth throughout the day, tiring perhaps but far more productive than bottom fishing could ever hope to be.

Most of the cod are, in fact, taken over rough ground where



*These anglers are fishing the uptide method. The cast is made up the tide, with the lead settling in that position. The method increases catches fourfold.*

bottom fishing would be tactically impossible. The cod can be at any depth from mid-water to the bottom so the jigging tactics involve working the lures at all likely depths until contact is made. Once fish are found it then becomes a simple matter of working the same depth repeatedly until, the fish are no longer under the boat. The engine is then restarted, the boat taken uptide and the drifting technique repeated down the tide.

Cod are also taken in summer by Kent and Sussex-based boats working out to mid-Channel in pursuit of the same cod which in winter came close to the shoreline. The Varne Bank is one popular and successful ground for Folkestone-based boats, while wrecks are also a productive mark.

There are, in fact, chances of big cod out of all southern ports during summer. Geordie Dickson, skipper of 'Artilleryman II', based at Plymouth, regularly fishes the ground between his home port and Geurnsey and cod are one of his most regular catches. These fish, taken from any of these ports, can range to over 30lb apiece and there is good reason to think that if the British record falls again it will likely be from this area. Sixty pound cod and even bigger fish have been taken here in commercial boats using nets so eventually the rod and line record must move upwards once again.

At present cod in the Irish Sea are in something of a decline. They must, though, be expected to re-establish their numbers with time and when that has happened there will also be the chance of some big individual fish and perhaps even heavyweight aggregates out of ports on Anglesey as well as out of Milford Haven and the Pembroke area.

Scotland, too, has big cod on offer. They can show in The Minches to boats based on Mull and, in fact, all along the west coast there are ports being increasingly used to search for and find cod by rod and line fishing. There has always been a spawning migration of cod into the Firth of Clyde in January and February annually and although these fish have been mercilessly hammered by commercial fishing there must be, off Weston Scotland, a summer stock still around.

A feature of this summer coddling is that it exists in areas of clear water where pirk and artificial squid lures show up well. Rough ground is attractive to the cod, as are wrecks, whereas big expanses of open water are likely to be less worthwhile. Later, when the sea colours after winter gales, the fish are more likely to break from their packed formations and turn to bottom feeding for whatever they can get, shrimps, crabs and other small fish, including dabs, plaice and soles.

Recommended tackle: Pirk fishing requires a rod soft enough to work the lure in bouncing fashion upwards through the water yet a rod powerful enough to handle one or more heavy fish simultaneously. A longer than usual 30lb Class rod would suffice, although if multiple catches of big fish are to be taken then even heavier rods may be needed. Fixed-spool reels can cope with light pirk but multipliers best for heavy work.

Powerful traces and snoods are best in areas where big cod are expected. Hooks 5/0 forged or bigger preferable. Pirks weighing from 12oz to 2lb, home-made just as good as most shop-bought lures. Fit with at least a 5/0 treble hook. Shakespeare-marketed artificial squid better than most.



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# Dell Quay

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# Coalfish

ALTHOUGH really big coalfish are truly sporting fish the best of them are almost invariably caught by accident. They are a by-product from days spent drifting or anchored over wrecks when the target species are more likely to be pollack, conger or cod.

That's really how the sustained run of record-breaking coalfish we have seen through the last 20 years has been caught. South Devon waters had a virtual monopoly at one time as the record crept up to find finally over the 30lb mark. But after Paignton angler Bill Saunders had taken the record from his son, both with fish caught offshore out of Dartmouth, the record was next broken off Whitby as the North Sea finally laid claim to a British record fish.

That weighed 35lb 4oz and was caught by Whitby fireman Tony Neatby, out from Whitby on 'Dark Island' the day after Tony and four others had shared a 5,000lb catch of cod and ling. In the two sessions only one coalfish was caught – but that was big enough to break the British record.

Alas there are not as many big coalfish as there used to be. Whereas, twenty years ago, there were days when charter boats fishing favoured wrecks in the lower English Channel would get a dozen and more in a day mixed in with a catch of pollack, coalies now show only in ones and twos.

Gill-netting over and around wrecks is primarily responsible for the decline, we think, but that's not to say there won't one day be a substantial build-up of these highly-prized fish. They in fact fight very much harder than pollack but are caught in identical situations with what is basically the same tackle coping equally well with both species.

These big fish are almost invariably located a long way offshore but there are substantial numbers of much smaller fish in the North Sea and off the Scottish coast. As a general rule these do not run any anything like so big as the fish taken out of West Country ports but they provide the basis for big aggregate catches, even from the shore.

They are highly prized, both by boat and shore anglers since they tend to shoal when weighing 4lb and less each and once the shoal is located the fun can be fast and furious. A big catch is quickly built up by anglers fishing with feathers, pirks, imitation squid and sandeels.

December and January are widely reckoned the best months for the big fish, but they do show in summer too, with the main ports for the really big ones being Mevagissey, Salcombe, Plymouth, Brixham, Dartmouth and Weymouth. North Scottish ports produce the big aggregate weight of the smaller fish.

Recommended tackle: Although coalfish are a much more powerful fish than pollack, never knowing quite when they are beaten, they are taken on what is basically pollack tackle. That would be 20lb or 30lb Class rod and middleweight multiplier reel loaded with matching nylon monofil line. Artificial baits fished on the drift are the most successful, among them Red Gill and Eddystone sandeel lures, but even much more basic lures and pirks can do the trick.

# Conger eel

CONGER EELS are known to grow to over 160lb in British waters and with the current record still a long way short of that figure (109lb 6oz) there is a lot of potential still awaiting exploitation.

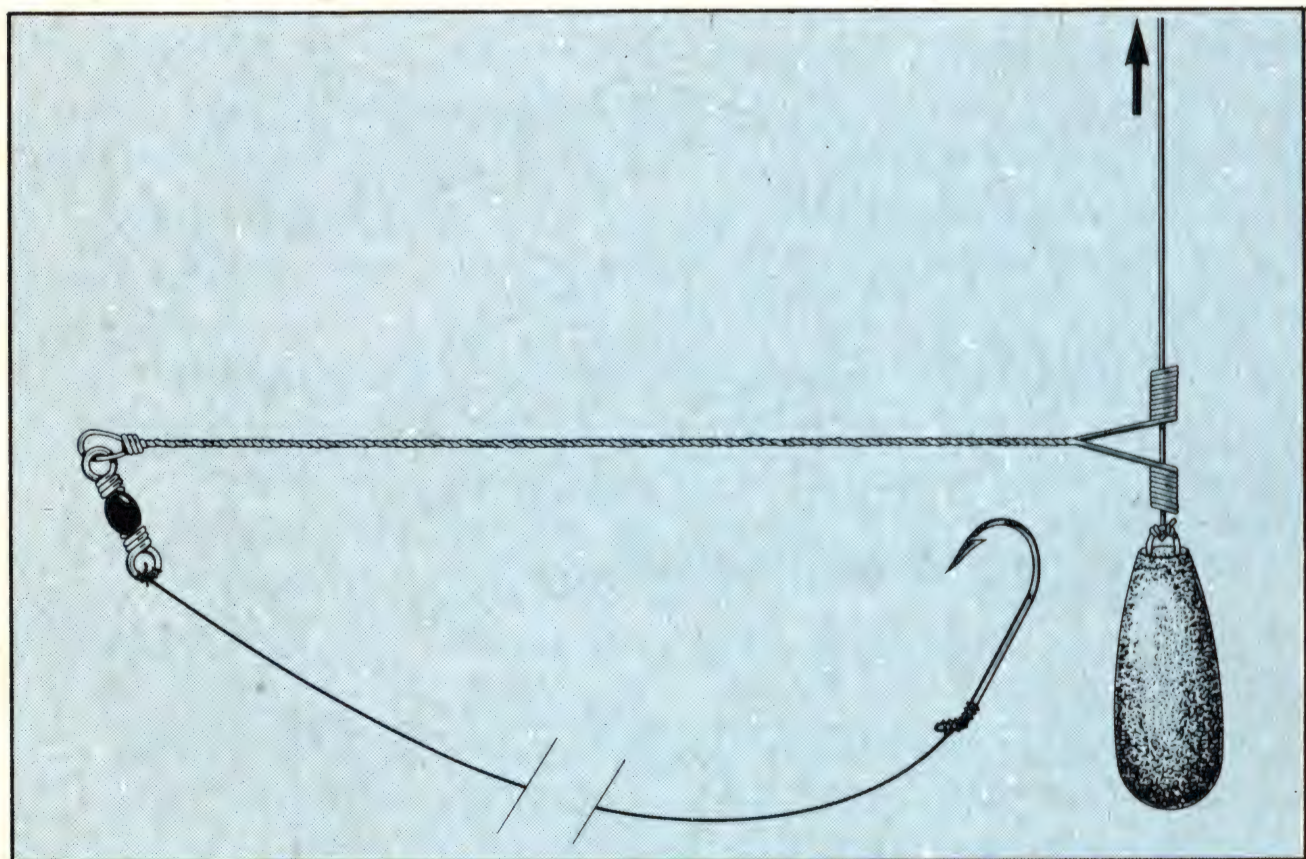
Rough seas and the stronger tides are the biggest protection for conger during winter. They could still be caught on rod and line during favourable conditions but the prime time is from May until the late autumn. Then the seas are more likely to be calm, allowing boats to make long trips offshore to areas known to contain the biggest eels.

Boat fishing could produce conger all around the British shoreline but traditionally the best results have always come from the English Channel. The western end rates best of all, with Plymouth, Brixham and Mevagissey acknowledged as the key ports offering the route to the most sport.

But conger can be taken out of all the southern ports from Dover to Falmouth, while the Bristol Channel has a worthy reputation for numerous if generally smaller eels. The North Wales ground can also be productive on the few occasions good wreck-held stocks are located, while Scotland, especially on the more rocky western side, also holds its share.

Our eastern shoreline is very much less productive. Early and sustained low temperatures in winter have killed large numbers of conger – some of them big ones – to prove they are there for the finding but so far as rod and line fishing is concerned they remain an elusive target.

The prime ground is the lower English Channel in depths of from 25 to 40 fathoms, with Kent, Sussex and Hampshire ports also figuring quite well. Yet they are by no means easy fish to catch. They are defended in the main by the large number of ling found on wreck and reef situations – and it is the ling moving in fast to beat conger to the bait which has kept catches lighter than



*The drawing shows the flying-collar rig used in the West Country for pollack and coalfish fishing. The snood shown carrying an unbaited hook can be baited with sandeel or an artificial sandeel can be tied to the snood.*

they might otherwise have been.

There is really no alternative to taking ling after ling and hoping the conger will eventually show up. Yet, when they do, they can show in quite substantial numbers. During periods of light flow or slack water several anglers can hook fish simultaneously.

Experienced conger fishermen hold the view that the British record is most likely to be broken by anglers fishing what might otherwise be regarded as a fished-out wreck. One from which big aggregate catches of conger have been taken but in which the small number of really heavyweight eels remains almost untouched.

It needs more than a trace of good fortune to haul these 100lb plus conger from a wreck since once they gain any sort of toehold with their tails no amount of heaving will budge them. For that reason big eels should not be allowed free scope to do as they please once hooked. It is crucial to heave them up from the seabed clear of wreck and rubbish at the outset.

Although the South Cornwall and Devon waters hold very good eels there are more out-deep out of Dorset and Hampshire ports, with the area more than half-way to the Channel Isles holding some really big ones. Rye boats traditionally do well fishing offshore wrecks, producing numbers of 60-pounders and better annually. Plymouth ranks No. One but the effort there is massive compared to most other places.

Charter boats based in South Wales get large numbers of fish from quite shallow water but these rarely top 40lb. It figures that the Bristol Channel area as a whole is something of a conger eel nursery and that the eels move offshore to other places so far unlocated where they mature and grow bigger. There must somewhere in the Irish Sea be some top-quality conger grounds – reefs or wrecks – which have yet to be located and fished.

The North Sea is less promising but the eels are there. Perhaps as wreck fishing becomes more popular in the North Sea a greater offshore effort will be made but results so far are only moderate.

Prospective conger anglers should bear in mind that the best prospects exist during the smallest tides of the summer. This makes it easier to hold bottom and fish big baits on quite strong tackle in up to 40 fathoms of water. As a general rule the best tides occur at the first and third quarters of each moon, while the strongest, less worthwhile tides are immediately after the new and full moon periods.

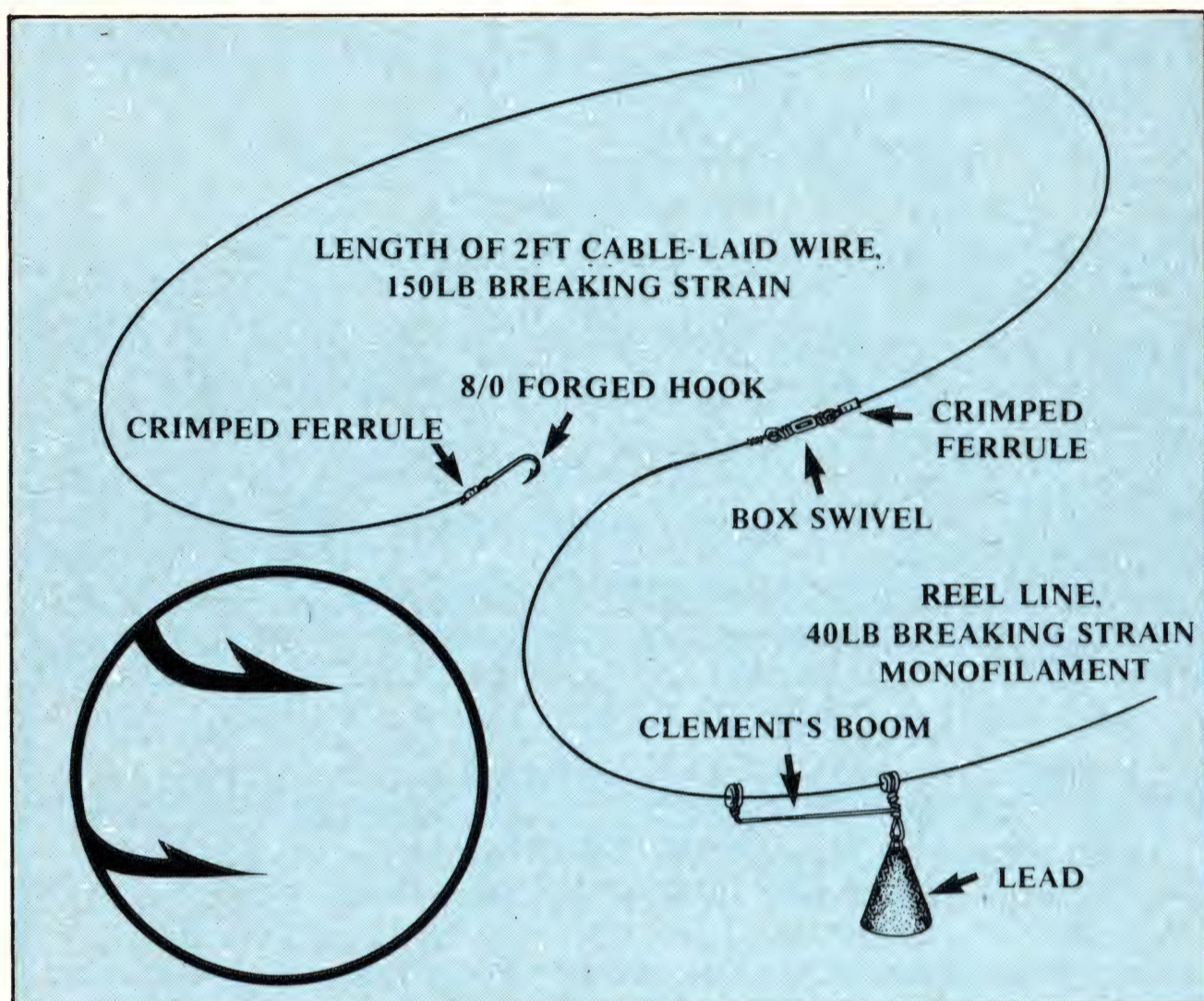
This is important to know when making a booking, realising that the best of the wreck boats are, in any case, booked up far in advance of the fishing date. This may make it difficult for latecomers who are left with the less popular dates and prospects.

It is also difficult for individual anglers to get a place on the better known boats simply because these are most often booked up solidly by clubs and groups. The remedy, for an angler who finds himself in difficulty, is to join a successful club. That's well worthwhile for other reasons too – it can cheapen the cost of travel and bait is ordered in bulk.

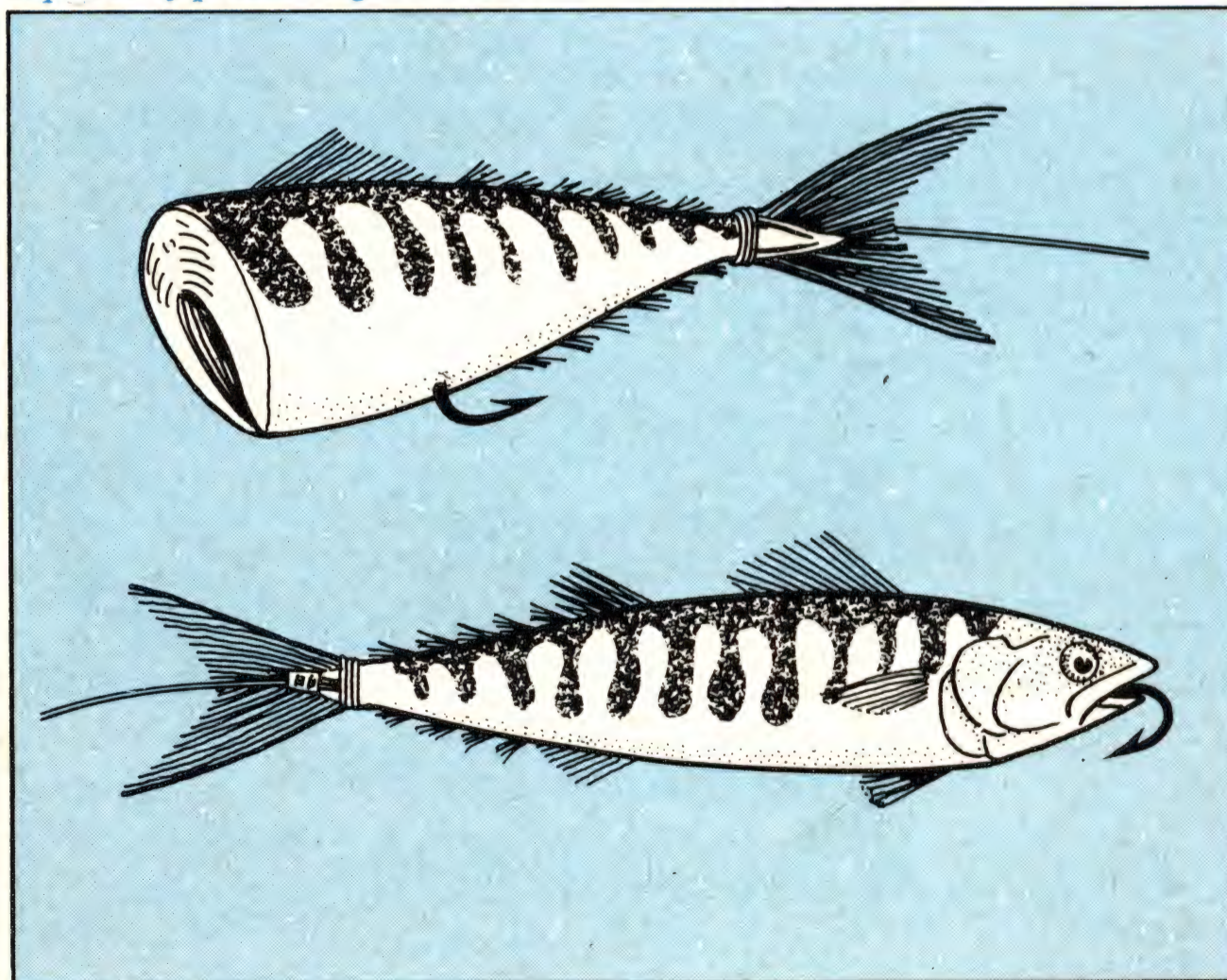
As a general rule all bait is obtained on the day by the charter skipper and the cost may either be incorporated in the hire fee or be a separate item to be paid for. Make sure you know the score when you book. Usually it is simply a question of letting the

skipper know if you want mackerel, herring or squid brought aboard – or telling him you will be bringing your own.

Recommended tackle: 30lb and or 50lb Class rod, medium to large multiplier reel, metal spool essential. Fixed-spool reels not really powerful enough. Spool loaded with 30lb, 40lb or 50lb breaking strain monofilament nylon line. Forged 8/0 or 10/0 hooks crimped to short but powerful wire traces – or 150lb monofil. Use only heavy-duty swivels. Offshore fishing usually requires sinkers weighing from 12oz to 2lb. You need some of each – and a spare rod rigged with mackerel feathers to augment bait supplies.



*The drawing shows an ideal terminal rig for conger fishing. It must be capable of pressuring the eel.*



*Fresh mackerel make ideal bait. The drawings show where the hooks are located in whole and half-fish baits.*

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# Common skate

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IT IS ONE of the tragedies of sea angling that common skate are now in short supply compared with years ago. A shortsighted policy which saw anglers kill most of the big fish they caught simply to secure trophy-type pictures made serious inroads and commercial fishing also made a big contribution.

As the result there is now next to no chance of catching a big common of 100lb or more while fishing out of any English port. The fish that used to inhabit the waters around the Isle of Wight and the southern part of the Irish Sea below the Isle of Man are long gone. The Irish too played havoc with their stocks but have taken counter measures to ensure that big fish are no longer brought ashore. Irish specimen fish medals cannot be won for common skate – making their landing pointless since they are widely regarded as inedible.

On that basis the massive stocks of common skate around Shetland seemed everlasting. Few anglers fished there and no-one wanted the skate commercially. All of that changed some five years ago when a market for big skate was uncovered in France. This triggered a massive longlining effort and Shetland stocks have thinned very substantially.

The example that exists to prove common skate fishing can be safeguarded is in the area off Mull, West Scotland. There charter skippers have long insisted that all common skate boated have to be returned alive to the water.

There are also signs that the once super common skate fishing out of Ullapool, Wester Ross, is slowly re-establishing itself. . . . Pointless killing there depleted the stocks more than 20 years ago but in the summer of 1983 the first big skate for several years were taken. The lesson has been learned. Those fish went back alive.

There are also some brighter spots around the Irish coast, waters off the Dingle peninsular, Co Kerry, appearing to have the brightest potential. Cork and Dungarvan, while far from at their best, could be rebuilding for better results in years to come. Other areas likely to prove worthwhile and with track records which could be improved are around Orkney and southward into the Pentland Firth.

The British record common came from Shetland in 1970, weighed 226lb 6oz and was caught off Dury Voe by R S Macpherson. It is believed that skate grow substantially bigger and that fish of at least 300lb are attainable.

Although very little is known about common skate, since in commercial terms they have little importance, they are believed to move to deeper water further offshore in winter.

Recommended tackle: 30lb or 50lb Class rod. Heavy-duty multiplier reel, metal spool loaded with 30lb or 50lb monofilament nylon line. Fixed-spool reels not suitable. Use large forged hooks and stout wire or monofil trace. Since common skate are often hooked close inshore and in quite shallow water, too, it is rare to need leads in excess of 1lb. A selection from 8oz to 1½lb is recommended.



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# Halibut

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ALTHOUGH they have been found from time to time as far south as the English Channel, halibut are primarily a northern waters' fish. The most productive ground for them within striking distance of the British mainland is the Pentland Firth, the fast, powerful waterway between Orkney and the North Scottish mainland. The British record halibut was taken here in 1979 and weighed 234lb. This is far from the ceiling weight for the species and fish of up to, perhaps even over 400lb, are attainable.

Halibut are also there to be caught off the western coast of Ireland from Dingle northwards to Malin Head as well as in the waters around the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. The best port for access must, though, be Scrabster, Caithness, and there is expected to be a revival of interest in the species there this summer after a lull in activity in recent years.

Best results come during slack water of neap tides when the awesome firth eases and it is possible to fish the bottom with large fish baits. Some halibut have been hooked on feathers and pirks by anglers fishing for cod and other species, but there is the best chance of a successful conclusion if the halibut is sought on powerful tackle and big baits.

It is highly probable that halibut remain a target through the winter months but more powerful tides and rougher seas act as a defence against rod and line efforts. June, July and August generally produce the best results. Not many fish are taken each year but success can be spectacular and this is an exciting style of fishing for the few anglers prepared to put the effort in.

Recommended tackle: 50lb Class rod, heavy duty multiplier reel, loaded with 50lb monofil. 12oz to 2lb lead required to hold bottom. Heavy duty monofil traces as good as wire. Use forged hooks 8/0 upwards with above-average sized baits – whole coalfish or mackerel.

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# Ling

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THE LING is not one of the most popular of sea fish with anglers, mainly because there are times when it can be a positive nuisance. It tends to dominate some wrecks and even rough ground marks with the result that it interferes with angling efforts made primarily in pursuit of other species.

For all of that it fills a gap, provides some heavyweight catches and is a species which seems to be maintaining its stock tolerably well against the commercial effort when other fish have moved into decline.

The best of ling fishing had traditionally been off the West Country coastline out of Plymouth, Mevagissey, Brixham and Torquay, among others. Scotland also had numerous ling, while the more recent pirking efforts for cod out of Whitby, Hartlepool and ports in that area has produced a substantial ling catch as a by-product. Some of these ling have been heavy fish of over 30lb but the biggest of the ling continue to come mainly from the West

Country. There has, though, been a significant size drop in these fish off Devon and Cornwall and while a record fish may still be attainable the proportion of 30-pounders contained in any catch is somewhat lower than used to be the case.

Ling are good eating fish and they can be relied upon to provide sport on days when conger, pollack and other wreck and reef fish prove hard to find. They appear to be spreading further up the Channel and are now in the Bristol Channel and Welsh waters in greater number than ever before. They are also available in some quantity in southern and west Irish waters.

There is no particular season for ling. They are available virtually every time an angler drops his baited hook into a reef or wreck location. Even so the bigger catches are generally made in mid-summer when neap tides and calm seas allow offshore fishing on wrecks that, because of their distance offshore, can only be fished at anchor at this time.

Ling, like conger, give their best results when the boat is anchored rather than drifted. The bait can then be fished down hard on the seabed and held stationary for the short amount of time a ling needs to waffle the bait. And that's not long!

Many of the very big aggregate catches made wreck-fishing include a high proportion of ling and that is a proportion which has actually increased due to the decline of both conger and pollack.

Recommended tackle: 30lb Class rod and multiplier reel are capable of handling any line but since anglers frequently fish for conger they are often tackled up heavier than is suggested. That is no disadvantage. Ling are not tackle-shy. They can be taken on mackerel fillet baits fished on the bottom or on fish-baited pirks and lures – with fish bait draped over the lure's treble hook.

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## Mako shark

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THERE are ten mako shark of 400lb or better recorded from the English Channel. All were taken in the years 1961 to 1971 and fish of that weight have never shown since. Which is not to say there is now no chance of anglers ever hooking such fish. Mako swim the oceans of the world and are only fleeting visitors to British waters. There is no reason why they should not reappear in due course whenever the fancy takes them.

The record fish, by Mrs Joyce Yallop, taken off the Eddystone Reef in May, 1971, is the only 500-pounder of all the sharks species that have been caught in British waters and is the biggest fish on the current British record fish list.

There are no known instances of mako shark ever being landed in British waters further up the English Channel than Salcombe but that's not to say the fish are not available elsewhere at least occasionally. What is clear is that anglers seeking mako exclusively will fish for a long time without reward. The two main ports for access to mako prospects are Falmouth and Looe with the early summer generally appearing best. More big mako have been caught in the period June to July than in the remainder of the summer so at least the hunt can be narrowed down to some extent.



*Monkfish are hardly attractive and lack the shape to put up a good fight . . . but they are another ingredient in the mixed fare available around the British coast.*

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## Monkfish

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NEITHER especially attractive nor popular, the monkfish is one of those occasional species which can turn up from time to time. More are taken in Irish than in British waters, with Tralee Bay and Clew Bay the two grounds containing the biggest stock. In British waters they are perhaps at their most numerous in Swansea Bay.

As the indications already given confirm, these are not in general terms, a fish of the open sea, usually showing close to land. Even so trawlers do turn them up in quite large numbers. The British record fish weighed 66lb.

They are not especially sporting, lacking the shape to put up much of a fight and most of them are returned alive after capture. They have mouths comparable in size to half a dustbin, are caught by accident and generally without finesse.

Recommended tackle: 30lb Class rod, multiplier reel, 30lb line, short wire trace, 8/0 hook, fish bait.

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# Plaice

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THERE are some species anglers have always done well with but our track record against plaice is far from good. It's difficult to establish why this should be but only in odd instances have we been able to take full advantage of the plaice stocks available to us.

Elsewhere there are known concentrations of plaice in existence but rod and line angling has a very poor success rate against them. Why, goodness only knows. Skin-divers have reported plaice close in to the shore but beach and dinghy fishing takes no more than an incidental toll of the fish.

It is, in fact, almost true to say that plaice show up almost everywhere we fish sometime or another in the course of a full year but that fact is rarely recorded in what we catch. The one, perhaps the only area where angling does well with plaice is on The Skerries Bank, off Dartmouth, South Devon. There, from March onward annually, substantial numbers of plaice weighing to over 7lb each, move inshore. They move onto the ridges that are a feature of the banks to feed on the sandeels that exist there in large numbers.

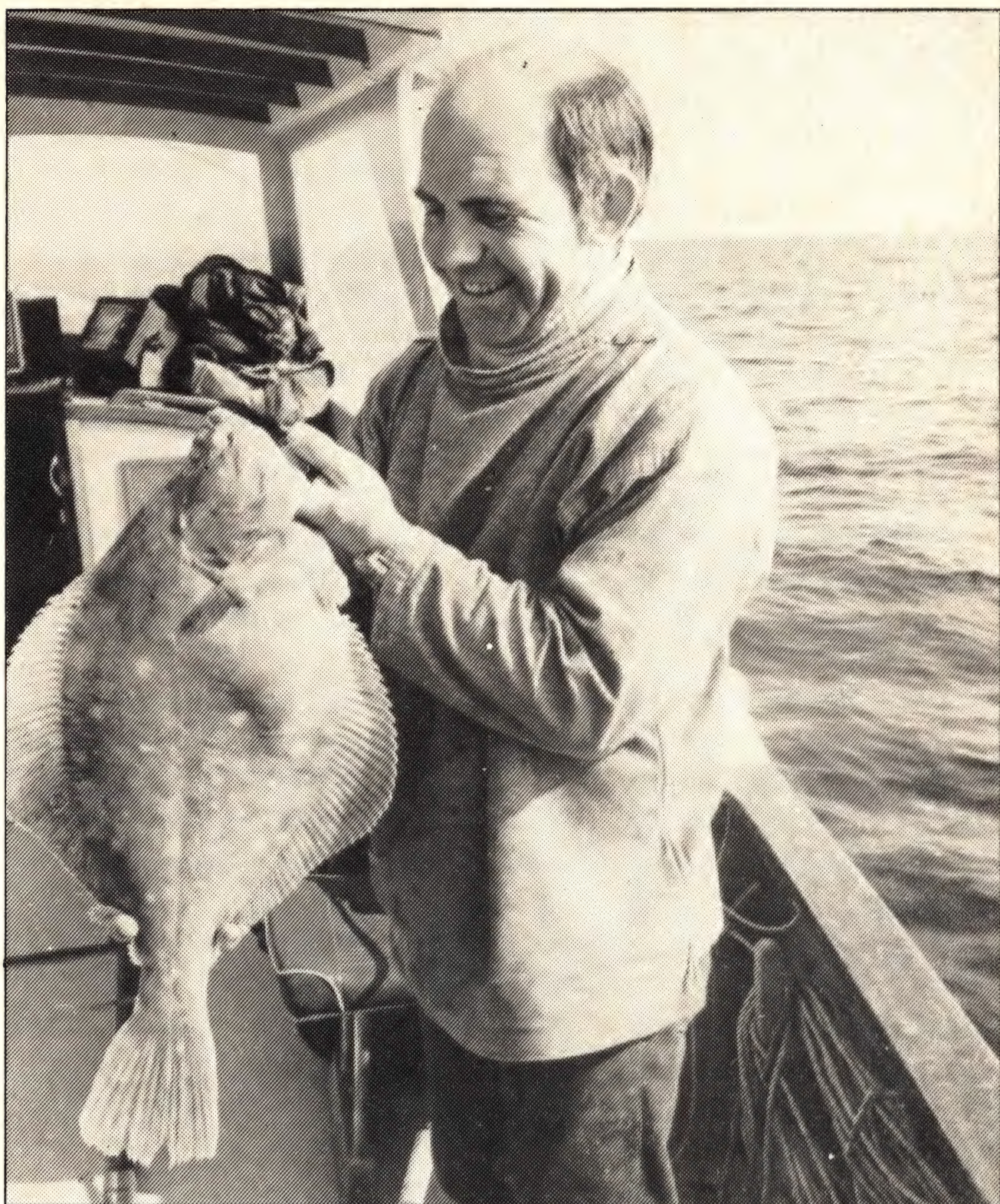
The angling effort against the plaice is intensive and although results tend to vary year by year and day by day the catch rate is quite spectacular. In high season, April is the best month as a rule, boats can get as many as 30, occasionally even more, in a day. The plaice have a high average size. Virtually all top 1½lb, most top 2lb. There are 4-pounders almost every day, 5-pounders most good weeks, six a few times every year and then, once in a while, a really huge fish of close to or even better than 7lb.

The season fizzles a little after April but through May and June plaice are there in large-enough numbers to make the catching of some fish almost inevitable. The sure bait is sandeel, fished in slivers, and either trotted down the tide from a moored boat or allowed to drift behind a boat that itself is allowed to drift broadside across the flow downstream with the tide. Worms also catches plaice but sandeel is the key bait, especially for the bigger fish.

Why then, if anglers score so well here, do they fail so dismally in other places? There are banks off the Kirkcudbrightshire coast that are cropped well enough by small boat anglers working from their own boats. There are intermittent stocks of plaice that show in late summer inshore close to Ramsgate and Folkestone and from time to time large numbers of plaice move inshore close to Yorkshire's Flamborough Head. Anglers take a substantial toll in all these situations, but commercial fishermen do the concentrations considerable damage, with the result that they are either decimated or disturbed, perhaps both, and the survivors soon move off back to wherever they came from.

The North Sea ought to be the biggest plaice-producing area for rod and line angling since it is, after all, the area that produces the biggest commercial crop of the species. It doesn't work out like that.

Even the British record plaice was something of a turn-up. That weighed no less than 10lb 3½oz and came from Longa Sound,



*Nigel Chope shows a plaice of just short of 7lb that was taken on a day when turbot were the prime target. It was hooked on a long slice of launce, drift-fished over the mixed bottom.*

Wester Ross, in 1974. It came from an area which was known to produce plaice of up to 5lb with some regularity but this was a fish very much out of the blue. The area hasn't produced a plaice remotely like that one either before or since . . . yet it would be ludicrous to imagine that this was the only plaice of 10lb or better to ever inhabit that ground. It's just that the angling effort has failed to get on terms with the stock.

Plaice cannot be likened to bass, for example, as a truly sporting species, but they need a specialist approach if we are to succeed against them. It seems obvious we haven't got it quite right just yet. Nevertheless they do offer a challenge for anglers who are prepared to make the effort to get on terms with them.

Recommended tackle: light rod, perhaps 9ft long, soft in the tip. Personal choice decides between fixed spool and multiplier reel since there will never be excessive strain imposed on the tackle. Line breaking strain could be as little as 10lb but could be complicated in some areas (like the Skerries) where bigger fish like turbot also populate the ground. In that case it pays to use tougher tackle, not because the turbot is a particularly powerful customer to deal with but because its bulk creates problems in what is generally fast tide. Dartmouth is the recommended departure point to The Skerries.

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# Pollack

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POLLACK have a wide distribution, being available around virtually all of the British Isles. They respond to much the same methods used for bass but if there is a real difference it is that pollack are generally clear-water fish whereas bass have no objection to sanded situations.

We find them mostly in areas of tide, mainly off headlands and on reefs in inshore situations, but the true domain of the biggest of our pollack is way out deep on offshore wrecks. The same wrecking revolution that first saw so many conger eels captured also brought a transformation in pollack catches. These soared and have maintained fairly well to the point where the best of them, made in the West Country, contain substantial numbers of fish weighing 14lb and better.

In some wreck situations – under ideal conditions over a wreck that has been rested and not heavily gill-netted – there are times when all the fish caught can weigh 14lb or better. It was from a wreck that a 26-pounder was boated in December, 1983 and that is expected to become a new British record once the Record Fish Committee has assessed the claim.

With 20-pounders coming with some regularity offshore it may seem surprising to know that in inshore situations the pollack stock is vastly different. Up to a mile or two offshore it is rare to catch even one pollack over 14lb. Double-figure fish are quite scarce and from this it becomes an inescapable conclusion that the inshore waters are the nursery areas.

That's where the pollack spend their early years until they mature, by which time they then move further offshore to join their deep-water brothers. There are pollack in the North Sea but as a general rule the fishing they offer doesn't compare with that available out of West Country ports. Here, with the fish spawning early in each New Year, there is a quite intensive effort made in January and February by anglers hoping for record fish. Even so the peak time for pollack fishing is in mid-summer.

Deep-sea tactics involve drift fishing from an unmoored charter boat. It moves down with the tide to cross over wrecks down on the seabed and although tackle losses can be considerable – as hooks and weights foul the wreckage – this is a very sporting way to fish. The fish fight hard and long . . . and most anglers have long given up thoughts of fishing two lures simultaneously on the basis that two big fish hooked at once would create tremendous problems.

Pollack can be taken on thin slices of fresh fish offered from anchored boats, but drifting with Red Gill or Eddystone imitation sandeels is far and away the most popular. Baiting with live sandeels is without doubt the most sporting method of all and when this can be carried out in shallow water where little weight is required to get the bait down towards the bottom the sport is truly superb.

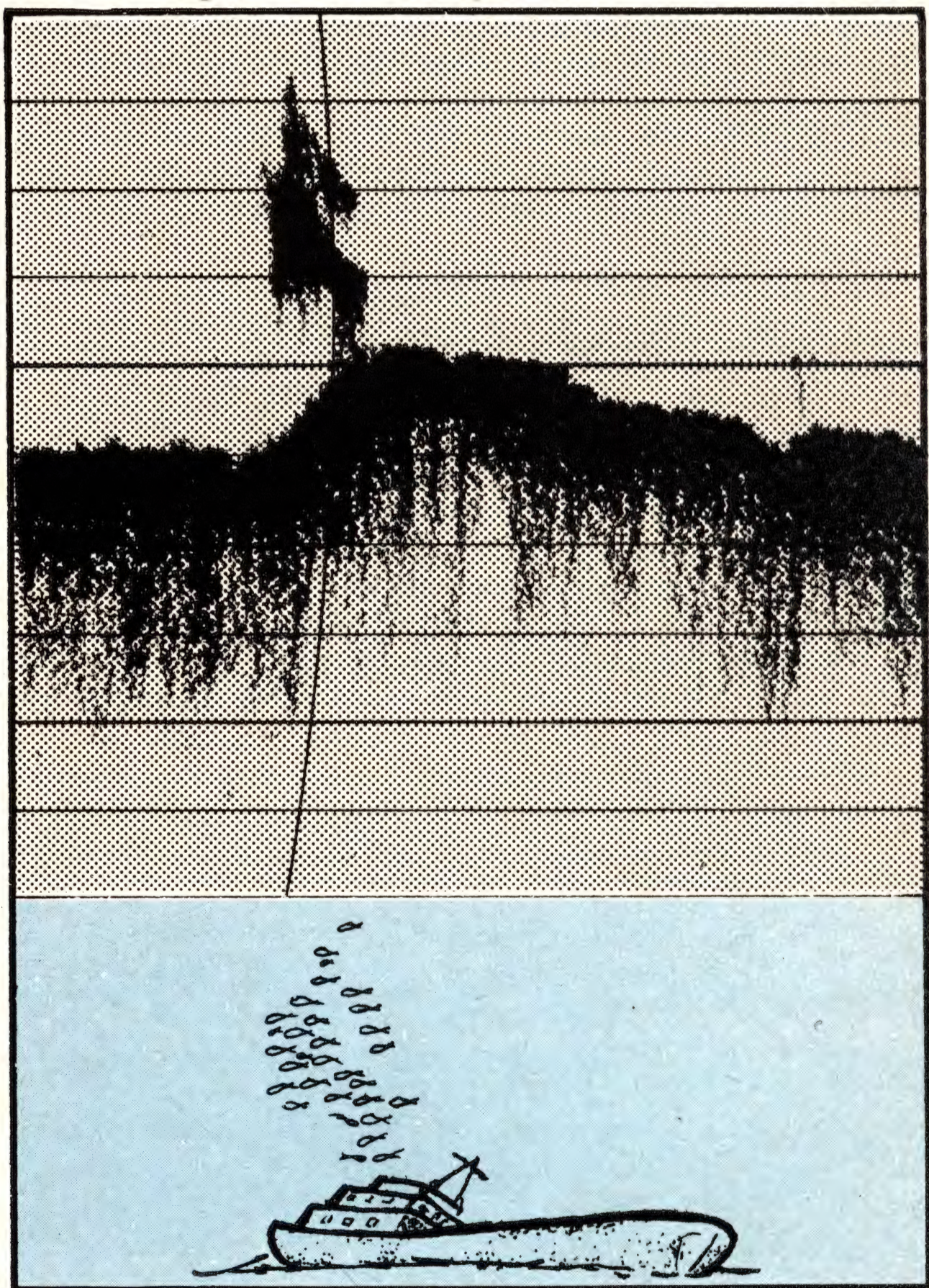
This technique is much more likely to be used in inshore situations and while the fish being caught will never match in size those taken in the middle of the English Channel the method is so superior that the fight from even small fish can be tremendous.

Pollack are shoal fish in the main so it is usually possible to catch reasonable numbers once the initial contact has been made. The same method of fishing will also produce the occasional mackerel and bass so sport can be interesting and varied even if 10-pounders are quite scarce.

Most West Country ports offer choice of offshore and inshore pollack fishing, although the boats tend to specialise in one or the other. Ensure you make your needs known to the skipper.

Recommended tackle: For offshore fishing use 20lb Class rod, middleweight multiplier reel and 20lb line. Take a varied selection of imitation sandeels (in colour and through the sizes) to allow a choice of lure through the day.

Imitation sandeels also score in inshore fishing but there may be times when the tide will not be sufficient to work the bait in moored situations. That's when live sandeels come into their own. Fish those on 9ft to 10ft light rods, using 10lb line and the reel of your choice. Fine wire Aberdeen hooks, sizes 3/0 upwards, depending on size of pollack expected. The weight is provided by small ball weights of from ½oz upwards.



*The echo-sounder graph shows how fish are marked up when located over wrecks. They do change position with the varied flow – and are not always on any one wreck.*

# Porbeagle shark

THE porbeagle is probably the commonest of the shark species present in British waters. Unlike the other three, it is a cold-water fish, meaning it inhabits all the water around our islands and does not, like other species, migrate southward to warmer seas as our temperatures fall.

In recent years the prime porbeagle-producing areas of the British Isles have been close inshore off North Devon and Cornwall and the waters around the Isle of Wight. Some are located in the waters closer to the Welsh shore, both south and west-facing, with Cardigan Bay holding these fish in mid-summer. These sharks are also present in Shetland waters, with what appears the best time to make contact being late August when the fish apparently move closer to the shoreline.

There are also porbeagle sharks in the North Sea. The Danes and Norwegians operated commercial longlining activities against the fish many years ago and although their efforts declined with the stocks fish are still present. It could be, in fact, that stocks are building up again and that activities out of such ports as Whitby and Lowestoft – and all those in between – could give contact. Here as in Shetland it seems late summer could be the best bet but hard facts can only be obtained by an attempt to catch the fish on rod and line.

The porbeagles caught in British waters are as big as those taken anywhere else in the world and the 465-pounder taken off Padstow, North Cornwall, by Jorge Potier in 1976 is, in fact, both a British and world record for the species. British anglers also hold a number of world line class records for porbeagles.

Fish of 300lb or better are taken most years on rod and line but big fish do seem less numerous in recent years. It is invariably true that when porbeagles are first located in what is until then new territory the fish are generally bigger. It seems an inescapable conclusion that rod and line fishing is responsible for the drop in the average size that soon becomes apparent.

The principal porbeagle-fishing ports are those serving the Isle of Wight grounds, Looe, Falmouth, Padstow, Swansea,



*Rocks show above the surface at low water. Porbeagle and mako shark will frequent such ground, feeding, no doubt, on the pollack always likely to be present.*



Aberystwyth, Barmouth and Abersoch. They can be caught elsewhere too but the season is spasmodic and the best advice which can be given is to book early with a charter skipper known to have a proven reputation for locating these fish. Don't commit yourself to a particular date without first seeking the opinion of the skipper concerned. Ask him when the best time is likely to be and take his advice. Fishing for porbeagles is a time-consuming business at best, don't make it worse than need be.

The fish tend to show in spasms. They can be around for a week or two, then disappear into the blue before making a reappearance weeks later. . . all of which makes them difficult to catch and a fish of prime interest only to specialists.

They are, of course, a truly sporting quarry, but it is not advisable to fish for them on the frail tackle currently in vogue with some light tackle fanatics. There is little or no point in tackling up for those fish with line of less than 30lb breaking strain.

Most shark boats do carry tackle aboard that's available for hire and it may be unnecessary to buy your own. Check though that this is the case at the time a booking is made. Hired tackle is likely to err on the heavy side on the basis that it may be required to cope with a record fish but no-one would sensibly purchase his own shark tackle without having first-hand experience of hired tackle.

Get to know your own needs. Most likely you will opt for a 50lb Class rod, a heavy-duty multiplier reel loaded with some 400 yards at least of 50lb nylon and long cable-laid wire traces fitted with a 10/0 forged hook.

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## Thornback rays

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THORNBACKS are the most common of all the ray family, which number a grand total of 11 in all. These are found all around the British Isles but their story, like so many other species, is, alas, one of continuing decline. North Sea thornback stocks have tumbled alarmingly in the last ten years and they are now increasingly difficult to catch simply because they are no longer present in the numbers of years ago.

If you set your cap for thornbacks and want a big score that can still be done, but you need to fish off the West Coast of Wales, not the East Coast of England. The ports bordering Cardigan Bay can still provide thornbacks in quantity – which makes Aberystwyth, Barmouth, Abersoch, New Quay and Aberdovey the prime places.

Boats working out of South Wales also get their share, as do those out of ports on the English side of the Bristol Channel. Ilfracombe, Combe Martin, Minehead, Burnham and Weston-super-Mare are booking and launching points for good quality ray fishing.

Rhyl, and other ports out of North Wales, Birkenhead, Fleetwood and Morecambe can all provide high aggregate catches throughout the summer months.

By comparison, the English Channel is somewhat down the league table when it comes to thornbacks, but since it does so well for most other species no-one feels deprived. Irish waters, on



the other hand, remain well stocked with these fish.

Due to the ease with which the fish can be both longlined and trawled it is difficult to see other than a continuing decline in their numbers. Cardigan Bay fares so well simply because some of it is restricted and because it is off-course for most commercial efforts but even here the fish are by no means as numerous as they used to be.

Taking that into account it becomes increasingly unlikely that the British record thornback, a fish of 38lb no less, will ever be beaten. That fish has topped the list for almost half a century.

Thornbacks generally over-winter out at sea, perhaps 20 or 30 miles offshore. They can be taken from the Bristol Channel and Welsh waters, Liverpool Bay too, very early in the season but the rays mostly begin their move back to summer quarters in late March. The big females, anxious to lay their eggs in the shallow water, come first, making this time of the year the best for a really big specimen. But the best aggregate catches usually come six to eight weeks later, with May to September the key time for the best Cardigan Bay results.

Recommended tackle: An uptide outfit consisting of a 9ft tip-action rod casting from 4oz to 8oz as required and a plastic-spoiled multiplier loaded with 15lb breaking strain monofil are the basic needs. A trace of 50lb monofilament takes the 5/0 forged hook. Leads will be 4oz to 8oz of the Breakaway type. The fish can also be taken by conventional boat fishing tactics, offering the bait down the line of the flow, but this is much less productive, especially so in a boat in which eight or more anglers are fishing.

Fresh fish bait is by far superior – mackerel or herring, fished either in chunks or fillets. Never be reluctant to change a well-used bait for a fresh one.



*Everyone's in a happy frame of mind on the return journey, with thornbacks to show for the day's effort – and some good-quality fish for the freezer.*

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## Thresher shark

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THE thresher shark, so easily distinguishable from others in the family by its broad tail extending for a third of its overall length, is not widely available around the British Isles. The key area for this one is around the Isle of Wight, where fish of 200lb or better have made a regular habit of showing in recent seasons. In fact virtually all threshers of 200lb or more ever recorded have been landed within 50 miles of the island. The current record fish, 295lb, came from south of the Wight in 1978.

Big fish of the species have been sighted elsewhere. One big fish, claimed to have been bigger than the record was battled and lost off the North Cornish coast and small ones have been netted in the lower North Sea. Nevertheless the only area in which anyone would logically fish exclusively for threshers is out of Isle of Wight or Solent and district ports.

So, embarkation ports for anglers seeking threshers are from Poole as far east as Littlehampton. That's not to say threshers cannot be taken elsewhere but they can only, on current form, be stragglers from the main scene. Most of the relatively small number of threshers taken annually are boated in the period July to September.

Since these are generally smaller fish than porbeagles, 30lb Class gear is generally suitable but as with porbeagles, a wire trace the length of the fish's body and to spare is necessary.

# Turbot

NO-ONE hails the turbot as the most sporting of sea fish but it makes such excellent eating it is a target fish of some distinction. Like the plaice it produces the best results in high summer, although there are some areas where the turbot results are best in early autumn.

A 20-pounder is an excellent fish and something like a dozen to a score of fish of that weight or better are taken annually. And with an increase in offshore wreck fishing we have now reached the stage where a 30-pounder is taken most years. The British record has, in fact, moved upwards quite regularly, now standing at 33lb 12oz.

As with so many other species, the best turbot fishing for big fish is in the lower section of the English Channel . . . although a 30-pounder was taken off Newhaven in 1983 so there are no hard and fast situations. But most of the 20-pounders boated are taken by wreck and bank boats working out of Plymouth, Torquay, Mevagissey and Salcombe. The ground even close to as well as offshore from Salcombe is particularly suitable for this fine flatfish. They tend to find sanctuary in the smaller sand patches that exist in otherwise rocky terrain, although The Skerries, off Dartmouth, a bigger area of pitching sandbanks and fast tide is a favourite. So too is The Shambles Bank, off Weymouth, and The Varne, in mid-channel out of Folkestone.

None of these banks now hold as many turbot as they used to do for while there is no heavy weight of commercial fishing on the banks themselves, sustained trawling in the immediate areas as well as on ground further offshore has depleted the stock available.

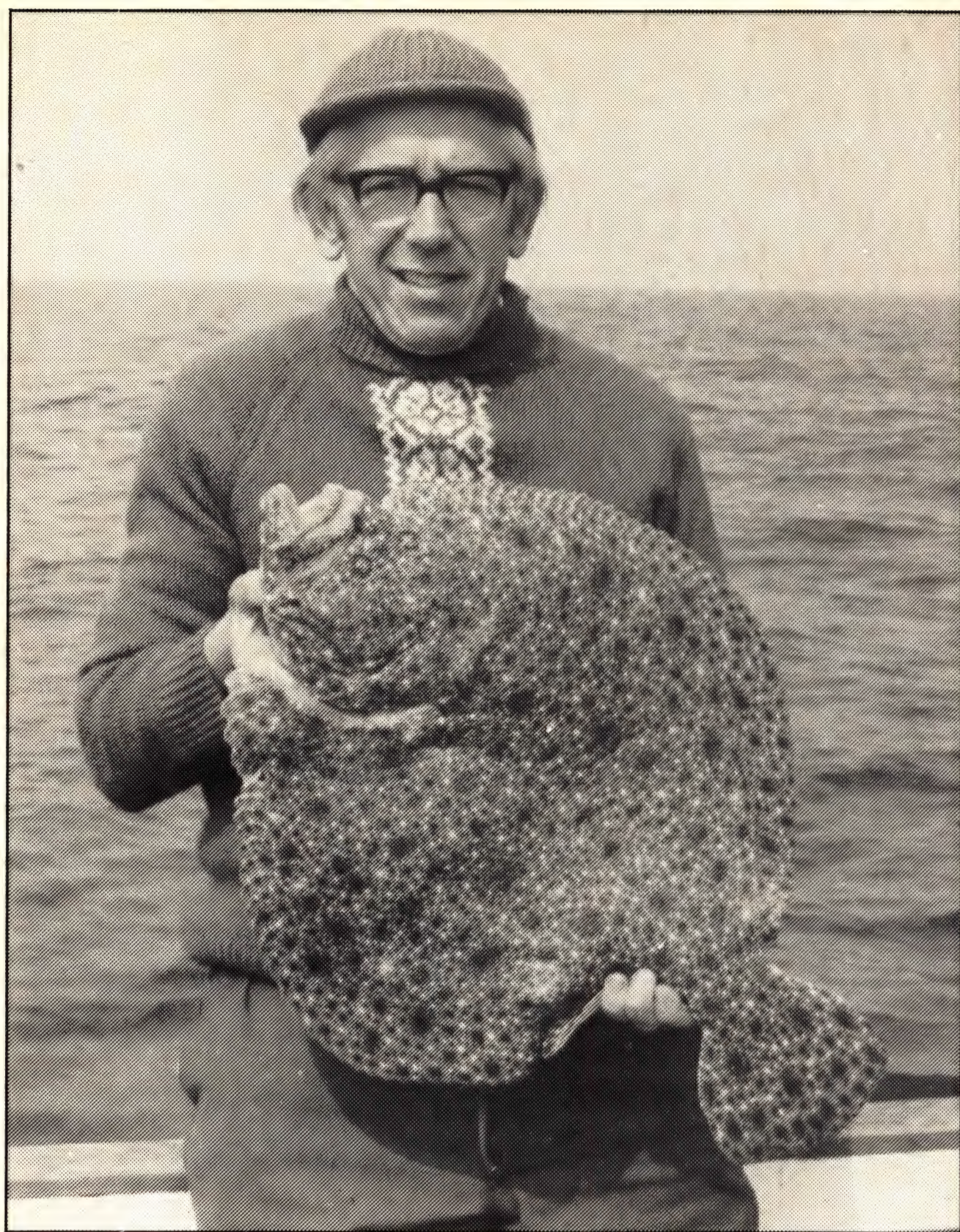
More turbot are taken commercially from the North Sea than anywhere else around the British Isles, but virtually all these fish reside so far offshore that rod and line boats make precious little effort against them.

Turbot are, in fact, available all around our shoreline. Welsh waters, especially Cardigan Bay, holds a lot of immature fish extending upwards to almost 20lb and it seems obvious the bigger ones are there but await detection.

Scotland, too, has its share, with the area around the Isle of Mull producing an increasing number of big fish annually. The fact that these fish prefer bank locations is also evident in Ireland where the country's number one turbot spot is aptly named Turbot Bank, located almost in the mouth of the estuary that leads to the port of Cork. This produces 20-pounders most years as well as substantial numbers of much smaller fish.

Recommended tackle: Since turbot are generally encountered in tide the tackle used to beat them cannot be light. A rod in the 20lb or 30lb Class can be used together with nylon line of the same strength. The rod can usefully be at least 7ft long and with a yielding rather than stiff tip so that the first probings of a taking fish can be felt.

Multiplier reels are generally rated more highly, with hooks 6/0 to 8/0 fished on long traces (around 12ft) to help ensure the bait moves attractively in the flow.



*Turbot fresh from the sea are brightly-speckled but the colour quickly fades. Torquay tackle dealer Ted Tuckerman shows a sample of what's on offer.*

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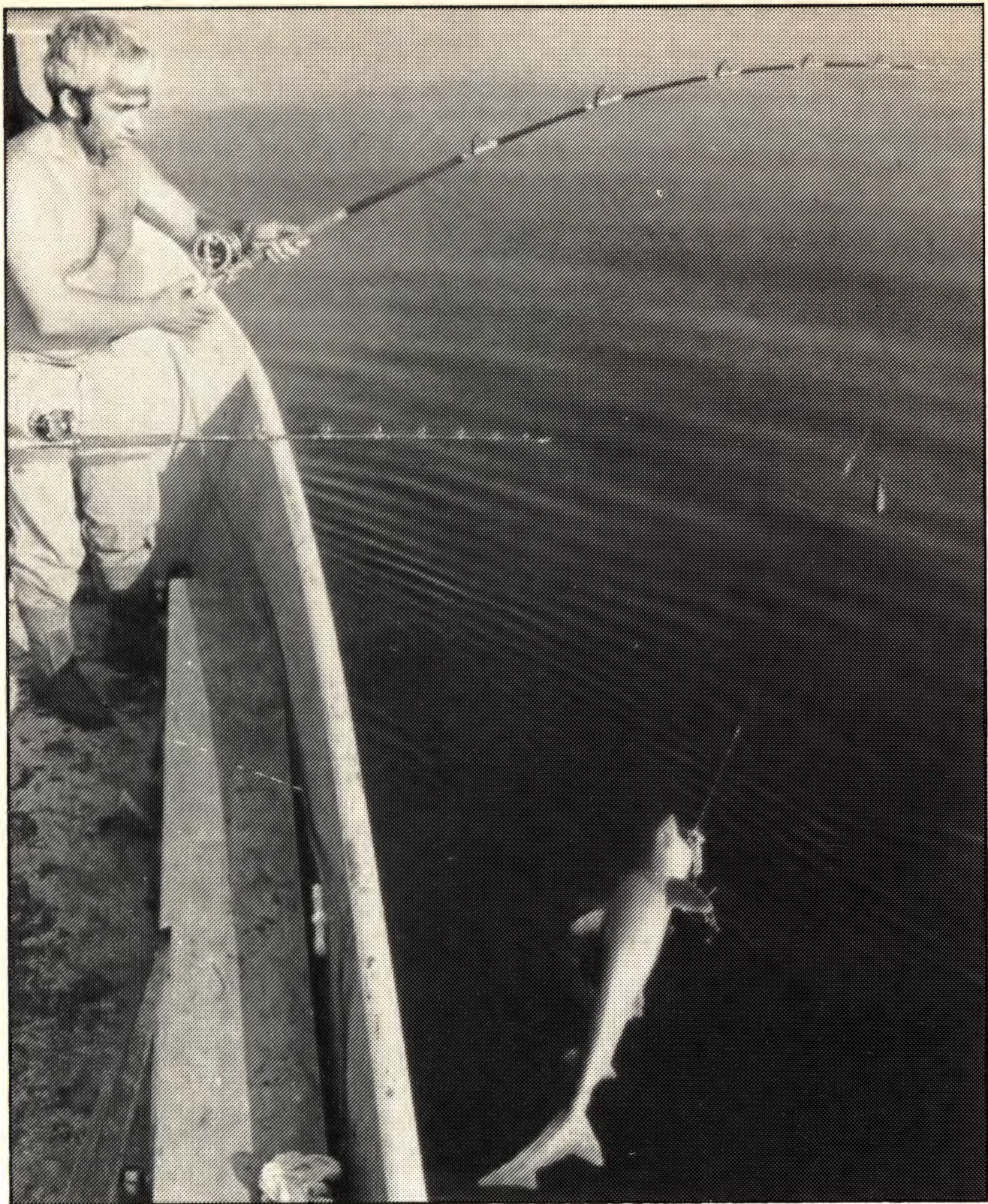
## Tope

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TOPE are one of few species about which rod and line anglers still have a great deal to learn. They begin their move into our waters in April-May and desert us for warmer places from September onward but there is no need to doubt informed opinion that we have yet to see the best of them.

Tope are not fished for commercially with intent. At best they are a nuisance so far as gill-netters and trawlermen are concerned but the fact that the British housewife continues to recognise their inedibility (although many would dispute that) remains their best protection.

Tope are rarely loners. The bigger they become the more likely they are to exist either in solitary state or in very small groups but there are times when pack tope are encountered in quite large numbers. The best prospects for locating tope in strength exist off the West Sussex shoreline, in the outer areas of the Bristol Channel and off the west and north-facing shores of Wales. Ireland, especially Tralee Bay, also offers prospects for numerous



*Alan Paddon brings a North Devon tope to the side of the boat. At times as many as 30, even more, can be taken in one day's fishing.*

encounters, with more tope found in the North Sea and into Scottish waters on the western side.

In mid and full summer the best prospects for big catches probably occur off the Sussex coast and off Wales. The Endeavour Group, operating out of Aberystwyth, has a consistently fine record for catches made a dozen and more miles offshore. Their successes come after generously groundbaiting with chopped mackerel and other fish fragments. Later in the season the tope show in very significant numbers off North Wales, where Rhyl boats get huge quantities of middleweight fish. Kirkcudbrightshire is another good tope ground.

The big problem really keen tope anglers face is sorting out the big fish from the others. That, in effect, really means locating the females, since male tope, year for year, are much smaller. In fact most pack tope are male in more than 90 per cent of the cases, so there is something of an enigma about female tope. They are much bigger but also appear less numerous than their male consorts and are rarely found in close company.

Since male tope are hardly fussy, and are just as likely to feed on the young of their own species as on other fish, survival is probably the reason for the fact that the two sexes remain so far apart for most of the time. It is, in fact, believed that female tope

grow to weights in excess of 100lb, whereas few males top 50lb.

In recent years, though, there has been a steady crop of rod and line-caught male tope from the southern North Sea weighing more than 50lb.

John Rawle's Bradwell-based "Vicky Emma" got one of 67lb – which must be the best-ever for a male tope, whereas the British rod and line record, 74lb 11oz, was a female taken off Saundersfoot, South Wales way back in 1964. At that time 60-pounders and better were quite common in that area but they have proved less numerous in recent years.

It is, though, the growing knowledge of North Sea tope stocks that furnishes the best chance of overthrowing the existing record. It is known that a run of big fish occurs in late October annually, presumably as these fish move south to warmer winter quarters. The question is, of course, where do they spend their summer months? Indications are this must be further north, perhaps far offshore, but once the ground these big females occupy is identified there is a fair chance of spectacular individual fish of 80lb or bigger.

There is also a good chance of contacting female fish very early in the season, as they move close inshore to have their young. Thus the two extreme ends of the season appear to offer the best chance of heavyweight fish.

Tope move closer inshore during warm settled spells of weather. They are believed to dislike thickly-coloured water – which no doubt explains why shore anglers can only make much contact during long, hot summers, other than in late autumn when some fish are taken during southerly migration as they pass close inshore of Devon and Cornwall.

The West Country is, though, as a general rule not good tope country. Quite poor, in fact, but then nowhere can have everything. The best access points to mid-summer tope fishing are ports in Cardigan Bay, South Wales and Somerset, together with Portsmouth, Hayling Island, Chichester and Littlehampton. Big stocks of tope have been found more recently off The Humber, so Lincolnshire areas can be expected to produce as can much of East Anglia and Kent. Later, deeper water off Essex must be favourite and although the number of fish landed is unlikely to be spectacular it is not uncommon for a catch of ten fish all to exceed 40lb.

The one certainty about tope fishing is the success rate of really fresh bait. Tope move in with the mackerel in the early season and those and flatfish provide much of their staple diet. So freshly-caught mackerel is the key bait.

Recommended tackle: Uptide tackle is ideal for tope fishing – which means a tippy 9ft to 11ft rod, lightweight multiplier reel and 15lb breaking strain reel line. A trace of stronger nylon should extend for longer than the length of the biggest tope (8ft) to prevent excessive wear and tear on thin line as the result of abrasion via the tope's rough, tough hide.

There is no real need for wire traces provided monofil of 80lb minimum is used as the trace – but this must be inspected during a busy session to ensure it is not being damaged. Eventually tope teeth will damage all nylon to the point where to continue to use it becomes hazardous. Hooks need to be sharp and forged in the 5/0 to 8/0 size range.

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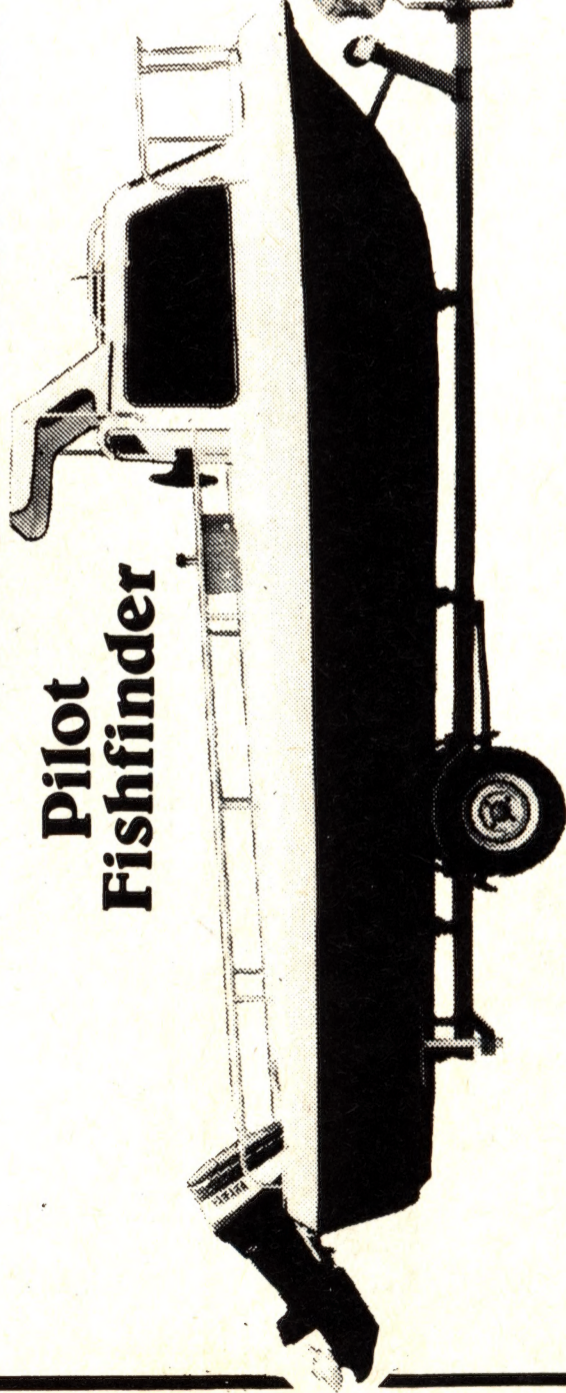
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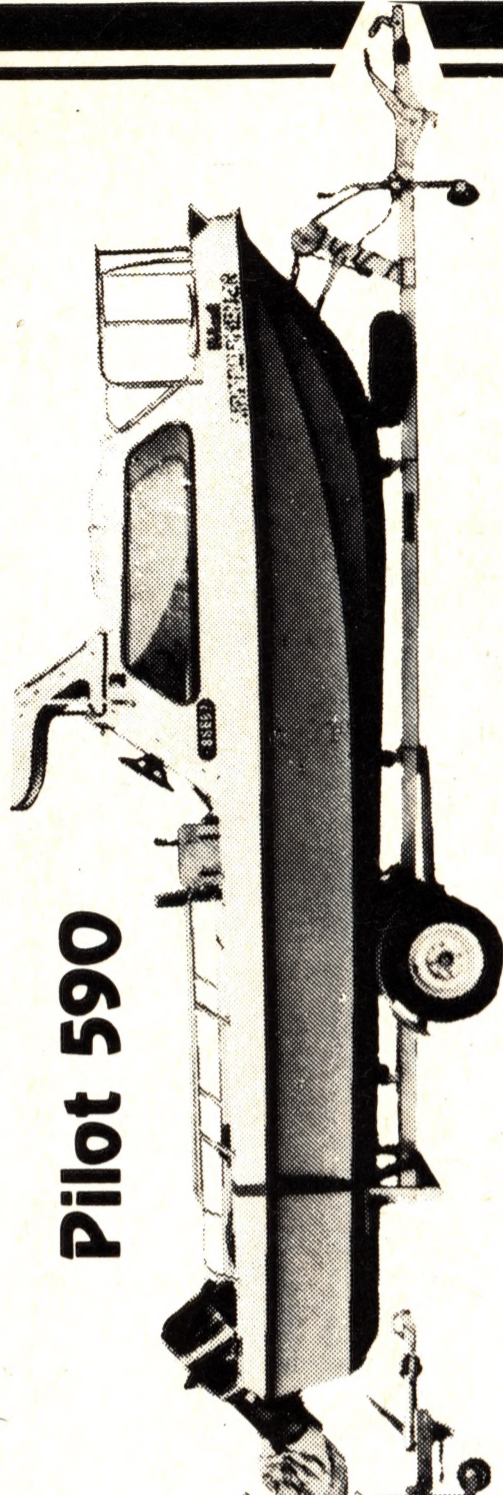


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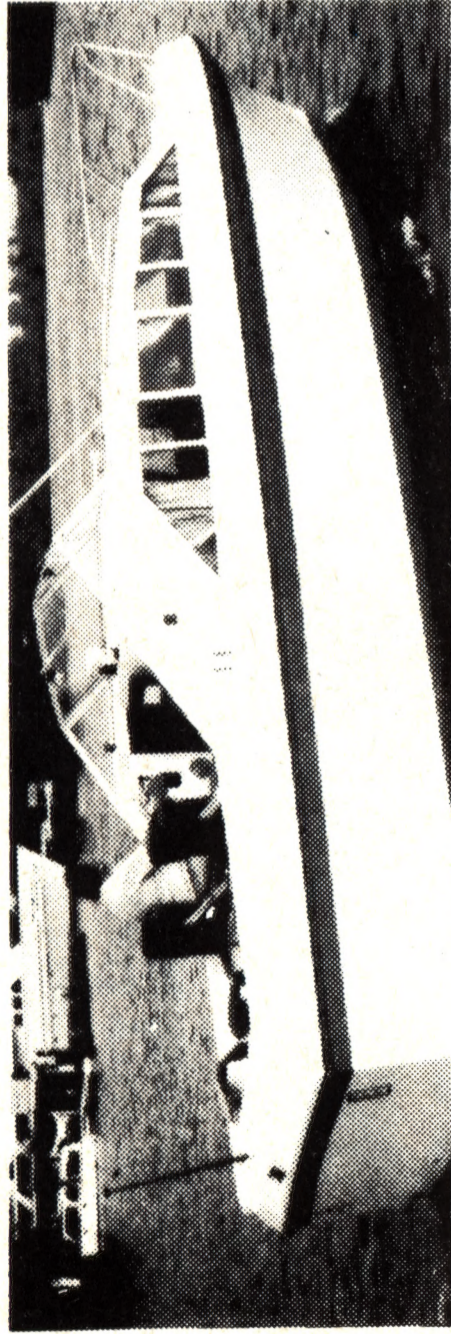
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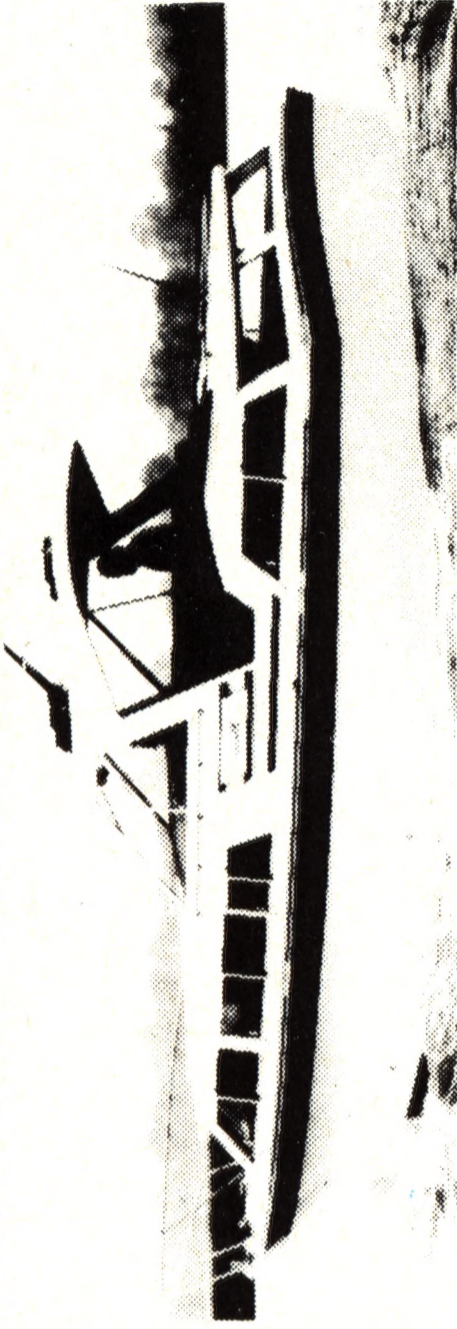
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